



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 21 November 2017.

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (16:36): Parliamentary colleagues, distinguished guests and my dear family. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and I pay my respects to elders past and present for their custodianship of the land on which we meet. I also acknowledge the Dharug people whose ancestors walked the Blacktown electorate. It is an incredible honour and a humbling experience to address this historic Chamber, the oldest Parliament of Australia, and to represent the needs and aspirations of the people of Blacktown. To do so as the son of a refugee says much about the equality and opportunity of Australian society. I recognise in the gallery the Ambassador to Hungary, His Excellency Dr Attila Gruber, and the Polish Consul General, Ms Regina Jurkowska.

My family story has much in common with many of the constituents of Blacktown, and indeed with many members of this Chamber. My parents came to Australia by boat as refugees after the 1956 Hungarian communist revolution. My father, Karoly—known as Charlie—was 20 years old and learnt English on the boat. My mother, Eva, was a teenager accompanying her family who were settling in Melbourne. My father travelled the countryside, working wherever he got a job. They met and married in 1959 and moved to a house in Doonside, which was the home of my Aunt Gizi. When Gizi returned to Hungary my parents took over the mortgage on the fibro house, which is still my mother's home today. My father was a fitter and turner and toolmaker. Dad was a proud member of the Metal Workers' Union. He joined the union in the late 1950s and was an active member until his death. In the mid 1980s Dad had a skirmish with the union leadership and managed to get elected as the national organiser on behalf of the rank-and-file reform group in their attempt to wrestle the union from communist influences.

Regardless of the political leanings of the union leadership, my father was always loyal to the cause as unions are the best form of protection and advancement for workers. Dad often served as a delegate at his local workplaces, as well as representing the union as a delegate to Australian Labor Party State conferences. His general nature was to serve his family, friends, workmates and the community. My father joined the Labor Party in the early 1970s and I recall my earliest election polling day activities in 1974 for the Whitlam Government. We maintained the rage in 1975 despite the result. I still have "Give Gough a Fair Go" stickers on my former bedroom door, at my mums' place of course.

Dad was elected to Blacktown Municipal Council in 1977—the year Labor won a one seat majority from the conservatives. I remember the great debates around the dinner table as my brother and I, as teenagers, obviously had the solutions to all of Blacktown's, and indeed the world's, problems. Dad remained a councillor until his resignation in 1987 and he also served as deputy mayor for 18 months. That decade, under the mayorship of Aquilina, Lynch and Kelly, provided leadership, innovation and change that created the foundation for a modern Blacktown city. Blacktown municipality was declared a city in 1979. It underwent a massive change and provided much-needed investment in infrastructure. I am very proud of my father's legacies, including the creation and establishment of a sports committee, a youth committee, the annual sports awards, the Youth Ambassador program, the City Games and the Nurragingy Reserve. These initiatives continue to flourish and benefit the City of Blacktown today.

My parents' values and beliefs can be distilled into two key themes: Always give to the community by seeking to make our society better and make a difference, and change what needs changing and create lasting benefits. Dad died in 2002, two years before I was elected to council. I hope I am upholding his values and building a great community. In local politics, representing the Blacktown electorate is a daunting task considering the achievements of my predecessors: the Hon. John Aquilina, former Mayor of Blacktown, former education Minister and Speaker of this House; the Hon. Pam Allan, former environment Minister; Mr Paul Gibson, a staunch advocate for the area; and Mr John Robertson, a former leader of the New South Wales Labor Opposition who implemented party governance reforms and spearheaded new policy initiatives. I acknowledge with some humility the presence of both John Robertson and Paul Gibson in the gallery and thank them for their invaluable support.

The strong support for Labor in the Blacktown region is a result of the hard work, dedication, and vision of local Labor branch members, generations of Labor councillors and local members of both State and Federal parliaments. In particular, my good friends Ed Husic, the Federal member for Chifley, who is here today, and Michelle Rowland, the Federal member for Greenway. Michelle, Ed and I have all been involved in the local area since our teenage years. This explains our passion for the area and our desire to make a difference. I also acknowledge in the gallery Blacktown Deputy Mayor Tony Bleasdale, OAM, and all my Blacktown Labor councillors, as well as General Manager Kerry Robinson with Director Glennys James who started her career when my father was an alderman. The collective support, loyalty and dedication of councillors and staff is driving a series of transformational projects in Blacktown City.

I acknowledge the great works of former Blacktown mayors Alan Pendleton, Charlie Lowles and Leo Kelly, whom I served under as a councillor. We mourned the recent deaths of Charlie and Leo. I appreciate the support and mentorship of Alan Pendleton and look forward to his continued future guidance. I also thank the Blacktown City Liberals for opening my eyes to outsourcing. Generally I am concerned by the outsourcing model, but the local Liberals brought a whole new dimension to it by outsourcing the role of mayor to me for the past two years of the term, despite having had the numbers in the council chamber. As a result Labor reversed all the Liberals insane policies and won the 2016 council elections by 10 seats to five.

I am thankful to my parents for my upbringing and instilling in me their Catholic Christian values of community spirit and commitment to social justice. These values made it easy for me to align with Labor's rich tradition of improving the collective rather than focusing on the individual. In his Light on the Hill speech in 1949 Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley said that Labor is "a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living..." Chifley was also the first Prime Minister to introduce the post-war immigration that so enriched Australia. His heritage, which was built on by the Whitlam and Wran governments, lives on in our multicultural society, which seeks to treat all people equally and with respect. Blacktown City is probably one of the most diverse societies in New South Wales, and possibly Australia or even the world. Within our borders are peoples from 188 cultures, speaking 182 languages, and doing so in relative peace and harmony.

In relation to my goals in Parliament, as with most electorates, the key priorities in Blacktown are health, education, services and infrastructure. The key for any government is to ensure that fairness and equity are balanced appropriately between the eastern Sydney seaboard and the western side

of Sydney, as well as accommodating the needs of regional New South Wales. We must not allow Western Sydney to be sliced and diced to fit definitions that suit some special interests but not that of Western Sydney residents. How can anyone seriously exclude Blacktown from the west? What logical reason is there for the Prime Minister and Premier to decide that Blacktown City is not part of the Western Sydney cities deal. I note the presence of Paul Lederer and David Slade from the Western Sydney Wanderers in the gallery. Given that they play out of Parramatta Stadium and their training base is in Blacktown City, perhaps they should rename the team the Central Sydney Wanderers. I don't think so.

In relation to health, the previous Labor Government started the redevelopment of Blacktown hospital and the current second stage is a much-welcomed investment that will make Blacktown hospital the fourth-largest in the State. I hope the Government will provide much-needed financial support to staff and resource the hospital adequately to enable it to provide appropriate medical treatment and address the current emergency waiting times. The incidences of cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, and diabetes are all higher in Western Sydney than they are on the eastern seaboard. Why is there more availability of high-end acute medical services on the eastern seaboard than there is in Western Sydney? There is an urgent need to improve the level of medical services and implement preventative strategies to address the imbalance.

In relation to education, former Labor Premier Bob Carr placed a heavy emphasis on education and introduced the Premier Reading Challenge in 2001. Today we see New South Wales maths and science standards are below that of Kazakhstan, and literacy levels are below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] averages. School buildings also play their part in providing an environment in which to learn. Three schools in my electorate—Doonside Technology High, Blacktown Boys High and Blacktown South Public—have collectively more than \$3 million in outstanding works to be completed. How can we in this Chamber believe that we have fairness and opportunity when many Western Sydney schools fail to make the grade to serve the needs of their student community? Some say education is a great leveller of society. I say education is the great enhancer.

If the people of Western Sydney are to find quality jobs, they need access to well-resourced TAFEs and universities. The debate on the purpose of education seems to be favouring the preparation of the individual for a job rather than preparing an individual for life. The problem with focusing on job-specific traits is that the jobs that people will be doing in 20 to 30 years' time are yet to be created. We need to develop an adaptive society where knowledge is transferable as the nature of jobs change so that people can participate in the democratic process effectively.

We should take our inspiration from iconic Dharug elder Maria Lock who was educated at the Native Institute and at 14 won first prize in an education competition. Maria used her education in 1831 to negotiate and secure her rightful land entitlement, as she said, to earn "an honest livelihood and provide a comfortable home" for her family. What a visionary, given some 75 years later the Australian Workers' Union Harvester case ruled on the same principle of defining the living wage. The population is approaching a 50:50 mix between Western Sydney and the eastern seaboard, so why are the vast majority of the university places located in the east? As Blacktown City's population rapidly moves towards half a million people, we need a university so that the aspirations of Western

Sydney's students can be realised without the need of hours upon hours of commuting—including expensive toll roads.

The residents of my electorate are angered when the current Government boasts it is anticipating a \$12.5 billion surplus over the five years to 2021 and they look around their local community to see an understaffed police force that cannot adequately respond to calls, urgent school maintenance not being done, their children in demountable classrooms that were supposed to be temporary, inadequate facilities to support victims of domestic violence, a lack of services and advocacy for people with disability or the homeless, a lack of rehabilitation facilities, cuts to early child learning and youth services, and once again just a trickle of arts funding in the west when we are led to believe in the model of three cities and a half-hour commute.

The New South Wales Government has set a population target of at least 522,000 people living in Blacktown City by 2036. This is the equivalent of the current population of Tasmania living in one local government area, but without the infrastructure and services the residents of that State currently enjoy. Even at the current population of 350,000, our infrastructure is overstretched. The State roads required to sustain such a large population are running more than 20 to 30 years behind current demand, we lack appropriate services to cater for people with disabilities, rail commuter car parking fails to meet demand and the existing hospital upgrades will be insufficient to meet the needs of the 10,000 residents a year moving into Blacktown City.

Residents using Doonside Railway Station have been crying out for lifts and we know that in 2011 designs were undertaken for the installation of lifts. I plead with the Government. The evidence is clear as to why the lifts are required, so please make the announcement to give Doonie a lift. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for committing to the construction of lifts in our first year in office. Maybe the residents of Doonside would have a better chance with the transport Minister if we renamed the lifts at Doonside Station Lifty McLiftface.

Much has been said about Badgerys Creek airport. The bulldozers are ready to start work, yet Western Sydney remains deeply divided on the merits of the project. Why? We had an environmental impact statement [EIS] assessment without any official flight paths. There is no identified and funded rail plan—just aspirational hopes of what it could be. There is no real fuel delivery plan, no procurement strategy to give local businesses a chance, no jobs or training plan for locals to access the alleged soon to be created high-value jobs and no noise abatement strategy. Once again on the simple issue of fairness and equity across Sydney, why does eastern Sydney get acoustic insulation, curfews and intraday flight restrictions while Western Sydney gets the raw sound and disturbance of an unrestricted 24/7 airport?

After 30 years of talk, one would believe there would be a detailed costed plan with timeframes in place. Unfortunately there is not and the locals are left to trust that the Government will look after them. If we are waiting decades for school maintenance backlogs, station lifts and road upgrades, what chance do we have of getting the aspirational promises espoused by Liberal-Nationals State and Federal governments for Badgerys Creek airport? The strong Labor vote in the Blacktown by-election can be attributed also to the community being fed up with the unfair M4 tolls. Yesterday's tokenistic announcement demonstrates the fundamental stuff-up by this Government.

The community is also fed up with the lack of adequate funding for services, including health, education and policing; lack of housing affordability initiatives; cost-of-living pressures as a result of the actions of this Government; and the lack of fairness and equity dividing Western Sydney from the eastern seaboard.

Finally, it is time for thanks. Election campaigns occur because of teams, not individuals. We deliberately treated the by-election campaign as if it were a marginal seat, unlike our political opponents who gave up before the race started.

Opposition members: Shame.

Mr STEPHEN BALI: It is not too shameful. It is good.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That proves that Opposition members will interject on everyone.

Mr STEPHEN BALI: There was overwhelming support from Labor members and voters, the general public, many community organisations and many former Liberal voters who voted Labor for the first time. To get 82.3 per cent, we are still finding them and we have sent out the search party for the rest. In particular, for the campaign I thank Jason Cranson, Jessica Malnersic, Liz Banks, Satish Kumar, Kathie Collins, Julie Griffiths, Balraj Sangha, Clyde Sinclair, Martha Lynch, the Facchin family, Jack Miller, Jim Kelly and so many others I probably will be apologising until Christmas for not mentioning them. I make special mention of Rebel and Rachael Hanlon, who turned their home into a campaign warehouse to store leaflets, signs and booth kits, and also a meeting place and a feeding place. I believe people are still turning up for a feed—the campaign never ends. I thank the Young Labor team led by Geeth Geeganage that helped in Blacktown and the regional electorates. I appreciate your support and enthusiasm.

My place here would not have come about without the support of the mighty union movement. I thank Mark Morey from Unions NSW; Alex Claassens from the Rail, Tram and Bus Union [RTBU]; Graeme Kelly from the United Services Union [USU]; Gerard Dwyer and Bernie Smith from the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association [SDA]; Brian Parker from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU]; and Tara Moriarty from United Voice's liquor and hospitality division. I thank you all for your support and friendship over the years. I emphasise the value of Russ Collison and Daniel Walton of the AWU. Russ has been a staunch trade unionist, and a leader of the AWU for more than two decades prior to his recent retirement. Thank you, Russ, for giving me a start and for the faith you put in me as I moved through the ranks to become branch assistant secretary and New South Wales president. Daniel, you are the new generation union leader to take our union to the next level. Thank you for your continuing support on my new adventure in life in the New South Wales Parliament. I look forward to working with you and the rest of the union movement in delivering great outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to the Australian Labor Party [ALP] State Office, including ALP NSW secretary Kaila Murnain, assistant secretary Pat Garcia, ALP president Mark Lennon and the whole team for all your help and support. Kaila, working with you as we both moved up the ranks in our respective organisations has been a privilege. I anticipate our friendship and banter will continue into the future.

I also thank many of my parliamentary colleagues who came out and helped. I will probably miss naming a few, but these people were constantly in my face. Maybe they just wanted to be seen—there goes my short career in Parliament! I thank Prue Car, Hugh McDermott, Nick Lalich, Sophie Cotsis, Jihad Dib, Julia Finn, Jodi McKay, Greg Warren, Courtney Houssos, Peter Primrose, Guy Zangari, Liesl Tesch, Tania Mihailuk and Steve Kamper, as well as all Labor members of Parliament and members of the Legislative Council who not only supported me in Blacktown but actively engaged in the regional by-elections. To my former councillor colleague and now partner on the backbench, Edmond Atalla, thank you for all your help—particularly during those early mornings at railway stations.

It was great to see former Federal members of Parliament and great friends Frank Mossfield and Gary Punch coming out to help. I thank you and appreciate it immensely. To my parliamentary Labor leader, Luke Foley: You are an inspirational leader who engaged with the local community on several occasions. Your call to make Doonside railway station lifts an election issue cemented the local community behind Labor, but I believe we were upstaged by your son on the announcement day. I thank you and your staff, particularly Chris Willis and Mick Popple, for helping out on the campaign and being a great sounding board for ideas.

Finally, with deep humility, thanks to my family. I cannot believe the courage and inner strength of my mother, Eva. She has had a shocking health year. A week out from the by-election we were told there was no chance of recovery from the dreaded cancer and she should consider palliative care. Yet, with her weight down to 36 kilograms, she insisted on handing out leaflets and stayed to the end of the election victory party. The family is deeply appreciative to St Vincent's Hospital specialist Dr Richard Gallagher—who I believe is here today—who admitted mum to hospital the day after the by-election and, through his intervention, has given mum a fighting chance to defeat cancer. Mum is here on day release and will be heading back to St Vincent's Hospital shortly. Mum, you are an inspiration to us all.

To my brother Charles, who has always been the ideas man and gifted musician—we do not look alike—my Melbourne cousin Alex and my uncle Alex, thank you for all your support. As you may have noticed, imagination for names in my family is fairly limited: The firstborn is always named after the father. To my loving and ever-patient bride, Anne, and my son, Stephen Jr, thank you for all your help and support, and for allowing me to spend so much time in the community. I know you see the great outcomes we are achieving for the community but I also know the sacrifices you are making. I love you both most deeply, and I lovingly thank you for your profound understanding of community life.

In conclusion, it is humbling to see so many people in the gallery from so many different walks of life. In my time as councillor and mayor I have had the privilege of meeting people from a variety of backgrounds who have had impacts not only on me but also on the local community. It is impossible to name each and every one of you in the gallery, given there are more than 120 of you, but please rest assured that you are considered important friends. Thank you for giving up your time to be here.

I see our role as Labor members in this House to strive to address the issues of the day and to provide opportunities for tomorrow. We are here to help those in need and to provide real solutions. We must serve the people to make a positive difference in their lives. Thank you for your

trust and faith in me to make a difference for the people of Blacktown. My task is now to continue to work hard to live up to your expectations.

Members and guests stood in their places and applauded.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On behalf of all members of this House, I congratulate the member for Blacktown and wish him every success in his role.